

Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group

Weekly Bulletin New Year Edition 2007

The Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group met this week to build on the positive momentum generated during the Christmas - New Year period.

The combined efforts of industry, community and government were acknowledged. There was a strong sense of gratitude towards the amazing efforts of the firefighters over recent weeks and recognition of the resilience demonstrated by many small Gippsland communities.

Most of the actions identified in the Crisis Communications Plan have been implemented and it is now time to reshape the plan to reflect that most of the industry will be focusing on 'Recovery' by February.

Feedback from industry representatives and local government tourism managers suggest that the coastal areas of South, Central and East Gippsland are doing OK, despite the flurry of cancellations before Christmas.

One of the key challenges facing the GTRRG is addressing the needs of Alpine communities still directly affected by these fires such as Omeo, Dargo, Buchan and Licola, while ensuring that the rest of Gippsland moves smoothly into recovery phase.

Members of the GTRRG will be visiting operators in small towns directly affected by the fires over the next fortnight to ensure that response efforts are conducted in partnership with communities.

The message we all need to be reinforcing is straightforward: 'The best way the community can support the recovery process is to get out in their own back yard, enjoy great Gippsland Food and Wine and invite their friends and family to come and visit.'

Evaluation

It is critical that the industry continues to provide quality data on the impact of the bushfires. Without this information the response and recovery effort will be compromised.

If you are able to provide reliable and regular information on how the fires have (or have not) impacted on your business please contact

your Local Government Tourism Manager or Visitor Information Centre.

The information gathered will be used to help guide the response and recovery process.

Support from State Government

The low-profile visit of The Hon. Tim Holding, Minister for Tourism, and Mr Greg Hywood, CEO Tourism Victoria last week resulted in a \$25,000 funding announcement for the 'Inspired by Gippsland – Celebration of Food and Wine' to be held across the region in March.

The acting Premier Hon John Thwaites announced funding for Tourism Response and Recovery Officers in Gippsland and the North East in a visit to Victoria's High Country on Wednesday.

Requests have been made for support from State Government for the repair and restoration of Bridge No 7 and track work on the Walhalla Goldfields Railway.

The State Government funded full page advertisements in Melbourne's major metropolitan newspapers promoting Gippsland as 'open for business' have been most welcome.

The Eastern Victorian Tourism Response and Recovery Group will be convened shortly. The EVTRRG will help support and coordinate the Tourism Victoria, Gippsland and North Eastern Victorian Response.

Australian Tax Office Lend a Hand

People affected by the bushfires burning in Victoria and Tasmania do not need to worry about their tax affairs at this time.

The Tax Office are offering to help by:

- Fast tracking refunds for people impacted by the fires
- giving extra time to pay debts - without interest charges
- giving more time to meet activity statement and other lodgement obligations
- helping reconstruct tax records where documents have been destroyed, and

- offering personal visits from field officers to help reconcile lost records.

If you have any questions or require assistance please call the Tax Office on [13 11 42](tel:131142) between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday. You can also read our '[Tax and bushfires](#)' fact sheet which is available on the ATO website at www.ato.gov.au.

The planned structure for Response and Recovery

With the ongoing support from the State Government the GTRRG will work with the Gippsland's High Country Communities on a customised response for each affected community, while initiating planning for the recovery in other parts of Gippsland.

The GTRRG adopted the following elements to be included in the revised Crisis Communications Plan

January Australia Day

In the lead up to Australia Day public relations and communications will focus on local events and the need for Victorians to support Gippsland by getting out in their own backyard.

These events will showcase the resilience and positive attitude of community in response to the fires as well as offer a fun visitor experience.

Representatives from the GTRRG will visit Walhalla, Dargo, Licola and Omeo, with the aim of gaining a strong understanding of what these communities need to help them get back on track. This will be done through questionnaires and face to face meetings with local operators.

Public Relations activities undertaken in the lead up to Australia Day and prior to the Inspired by Gippsland Brand Launch will include 'inspiring' recovery stories of the people and places in our region.

Federation Square VIC volunteers will be given a special regional briefing in late January by Gippsland's Local Government and VIC managers. The briefing will focus on the products and great experiences Gippsland have to offer.

February

'Inspired by Gippsland' campaign

The 'Inspired by Gippsland' campaign will begin in February as planned and run through to June.

The GTRRG noted the need to accelerate the production of an additional set of brand images that highlight the High Country Experience, Walhalla and 'rolling green hills'.

This campaign will be integrated with promotion the 'Inspired by Gippsland – Celebration of Food and Wine' to be held in March.

A display will also be organized by Experience Gippsland at the Victorian 4WD Expo to be held in Wandin in mid February. A fact sheet will be distributed giving 4WD enthusiasts the latest info on which tracks and places are open.

March

Inspired by Gippsland Celebration of Gippsland Food and Wine

This major regional food and wine event will integrate promotional activity with the 'Inspired by Gippsland' campaign to encourage visitation and yield in the region.

It will include regional events such as the Inverloch Food and Wine Festival, Feast on East, Palate of Passions, Gippsland Harvest Festival (Harvest of Gippsland) and the World's Longest Lunch.

This project will include a substantial marketing campaign in metro print, local television and radio, and will include hiring a display space for the month in Federation Square VIC promoting Gippsland and its food and wine.

Media/ Public Relations

The GTRRG continues to generate significant levels of positive media coverage for the region in partnership with industry.

We welcome story ideas and suggestions from operators and industry associations as to how we can leverage additional positive PR for the region.

We are still in the 'pay it forward' mode and need to emphasise our commitment to a regional approach, but we want to start focusing on 'villages' and destinations that have a story to tell.

The need for a strong and unified response to bushfires is critical. If you are contacted directly by the media regarding the impact of the bushfires, please refer them to Chris Buckingham on 0429 869 838.

People looking for inspirational experiences in Gippsland can go to: www.destinationgippsland.com.au and www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Officer

Jenny Brown commenced work on January 2nd and has hit the ground running.

If you require assistance during please contact Jenny on 5142 3487, or for urgent matters call Chris Buckingham on 0429 869 638.

If you want more information on the Response and Recovery effort please go to the dedicated tourism industry website www.gippslandtourism.net.au

Ongoing Communication with Industry

The GTRRG is committed to working with the industry to provide a unified and effective regional response and recovery process.

To achieve this we need your feedback, suggestions and ideas. Please feel welcome to make contact with us via the phone or email jennybr@wellington.vic.gov.au

Support Services for operators

If things are getting you down and you need someone to talk to, call:

LIFELINE GIPPSLAND 24hr telephone counseling 13 1114

To access business planning support and advice through State Government please contact **Business Line 13 2215**

Information on Disaster Relief from the Australian Government

Go to www.disasterassist.gov.au or for further assistance call the **Australian Government Bushfire Assistance Helpline on 1802233** or visit your local Centrelink Office.

The Last Word...

Tourism employs 4,500 people and generates \$600 million per annum in direct spend for Gippsland. If we continue to work together we will minimize job losses in our communities and continue to play a vital role in the wellbeing of our regional economy.

